

STEP NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2019



Daviesia mimosoides Narrow-leaved bitter-pea. Photo taken on October 8th this year by Andy Russell

From the President

Seasons Greetings to you all. I hope you can look back on 2019 as a year in which you achieved your goals, created harmony or made a difference in some way.

The prolonged dry weather has presented many challenges for us. Both our Autumn and Spring plantings were considerably reduced but we continue to collect seed for propagation and planting of seedlings at a later date.

In the last Newsletter there was a report on our Workshop for representatives from Regional Botanic Gardens. Following this event, a report of the discussion points was written and circulated to the participants and also sent to those groups who had been invited but were not able to attend. A summary of this report is included for you to read.

The opening of the Bush Tucker Garden by Minister Steel on 30 October was a well-attended event (see article).

At a recent STEP working bee, Andy Russell informed us it was National Pollinator Week and gave a brief outline of how to observe and report on insects which were engaged in this vital activity (see article). By chance later that morning we saw that the *Eucalyptus blakelyi* which were in bloom were totally abuzz with thousands of blossom chafers (see article).

A month ago, Mike and I returned from a trip to Western Australia. I have penned a short item about the forests of the south-west which may be of interest.

Best wishes to you all for Christmas and 2020 – how good it would be if Santa could bring rain to all those who so desperately need it.

Judy Smith

Annual Report 1 July 2018 – 30 June 2019

Southern Tablelands Ecosystem Park reached an important milestone in its short existence. In 2009 the first trees were planted in Forest 20, hence 2019 became the tenth anniversary of our development of the Southern Tablelands Regional Botanic Garden, located at Forest 20, National Arboretum Canberra.

The STEP committee resolved to celebrate STEP's achievements by organising several key events at Forest 20 and to promote Forest 20 as a location for others to use and plan activities. This Annual Report only covers the first half of 2019, so a complete summary of our tenth year of planting will wait until next year. Our main celebration, a 'soiree' held on 22 March was attended by over 100 guests, including the Chief Minister (Andrew Barr, MLA), some tree planters from 2009 and many staff from the Arboretum. Mr Barr also planted a tree (*Eucalyptus melliodora* – Yellow Box), the third Chief Minister to have planted a tree or shrub at Forest 20.

The prolonged dry period reported last year has continued in 2019 and in a background of community concern about climate change and the predicted change to patterns of rainfall and temperature. STEP volunteers have continued to support development and management of Forest 20, in fact the number of STEPpers attending our Working Bees has shown a small increase.

Key milestones and activities for the year to 30 June 2019 include:

- Our weekly working bees continue to be the main activity for volunteers. Records show that the total hours contributed was 2283, which together with other volunteer contributions is equivalent to 2303 8-hour days or 60 5-day working weeks. Our newsletter editor has issued quarterly editions, monthly circulations of a photographic sheet 'Of Interest at Forest 20' and a booklet that records twelve months of these sheets.
- STEP continues its membership of the Council of the Friends of the Arboretum, contributes to the annual ParkCare display at Jamison Centre shops, and assists the Arboretum in its visitor guiding program.
- STEP has continued to encourage other groups and organisations to use Forest 20 as a venue for their activities and interests where these are consistent with our aims. During the year STEP assisted several visits from students from the Canberra Institute of Technology (Horticulture & Forestry) in undertaking tree measurement and eucalypt identification.
- The Bush Tucker Garden developed by the Arboretum in part of Forest 20 has been completed. In May 2019 it was the venue for two significant reconciliation events for members of the ACT Public Service. STEP volunteers provided guides for visitors to these events.
- Other events are developing into regular or annual events. NatureArtLab again joined with STEP in hosting our third 'STEP into Plein Air' morning at which included a demonstration of eucalypt painting by a NatureArtLab tutor.

- Wattle Day 2018 was again marked with walks guided by Arboretum guides and the Wattle Day Committee in celebration of Australia's national emblem. STEP commenced planning for an Acacia walk along two sides of Forest 20, in order to provide a dedicated display of southern tablelands Acacias and to enhance our 'edge'
- Another major milestone for STEP was the construction of a new shed. In another demonstration of our partnership with the Arboretum, we combined resources and expertise to prepare the site, pour the slab and have the shed constructed to a standard already established by the Arboretum. STEPpers then worked hard to prepare the shed's interior for the growing number and variety of tools and other equipment used each week by our volunteers.
- In May 2019 the Arboretum nominated STEP for recognition in the ACT's Volunteers of the Year award. To our great surprise and delight STEP was awarded the 2019 Volunteer Team of the Year. This award is a fitting recognition of the contributions made by so many STEPpers over the past 10 years at Forest 20. We appreciate the support received from Arboretum staff in enabling STEP to continue our project at Forest 20.

Judy Smith, President, 30 September 2019

Thanks for your service

As our AGM approaches (Sunday 24 November, 11 am) it is timely to acknowledge the work of some committee members who are standing down. Lainie Shorthouse has been a great stalwart. She has been on the STEP committee for some years and is taking a well-earned break. She always brought a level-headed and reasoned approach to committee matters and compassion and care for members and friends. In recent times she has been STEP's representative on the Friends' Council and while she is not going to be on STEP Committee, I know she will continue to be a valuable presence at our working bees.

Heather Green has been our Minutes Secretary for two years and has been very efficient and effective with the organizing of agendas and reporting of our meetings. In addition, Heather has taken an active role managing participants registering for events such as STEP into Plein Air and the recent Workshop and organizing lunches at STEP. Heather will continue as a STEP member attending working bees - she is often seen Weed Wandering, ensuring our paths are weed free.

Terry Murphy brought many skills and interests to the committee. His horticultural skills and knowledge have been invaluable, shown by his passion for collecting and propagating seeds. He has taught many of us how to "pot on" and care for seedlings. In addition, he brought a wealth of practical skills in the construction and fit out of the new shed. With Bill Handke, they planned the logistics, liaised with NAC staff and produced an excellent result which will bring benefits to STEP for many years to come.

We extend a heartfelt thanks to these three people whose efforts are much appreciated.

Summary of discussion notes from the Workshop for Regional Botanic Gardens

Recruitment, enrichment and support of volunteers. It was generally agreed that, unfortunately, too many volunteers created difficulties. If extra people were needed, it was often through word of mouth that they joined. To ensure continuity of work, weekly meetings were seen as more effective than monthly ones. Some RBGs were able to use corrective services personnel, Men's shed and TAFE people "heavy lifting", technical or other specialised skills.

Induction. All groups agreed that workplace safety was a key element of induction for new members. Other suggestions included: a "buddy" system; information folder; training skills for specific equipment; sign on and off; adjust working hours for weather conditions and advice from a physiotherapist about physical limits of tasks.

Keeping Volunteers. The general consensus was that social interaction was a key factor in making volunteers feel valued. It was reported that the majority of volunteers wanted to learn about plants and hands on gardening. To enrich the volunteer experience, groups variously ensured successes were celebrated, a calendar of events was produced, group activities were interactive such as tree pruning demonstrations, Christmas drinks in the garden, art days etc.

Fund Raising. As the various RBGs represented were all under different administrations, the range of fundraising methods varied widely. Some points were that keeping in touch with local state and federal for financial assistance, have projects ready to go, and that when writing grant applications keep the tone clear and focussed.

Site Management. Again, the variety of RBGs was reflected in the variety of their sites and management strategies. Water management was a common theme and suggestions were deep ripping 2 years prior to planting, soil testing for phosphorus levels, and mulching up to 40cm depth for weed control.

Weed/insect/pest management. It was universally agreed that vigilance and hard work were the keys to weed, insect and pest management. One ingenious method of controlling weeds on paths was to put down sheets of corrugated iron and "cook" the weeds.

"Pull" factors. An RBG was considered successful if it could encourage community use of the space. Suggestions for this were opening the site for festivals, weddings, education groups, having a visitor book for suggestions and comments, and have pamphlets in visitor centres, caravan parks and the like.

Travellers' Tale: Tingle Trees – magical giants of WA's south west forests.

In September and October, Mike and I had an amazing road trip around WA – Perth to Monkey Mia (stromatolites) to Carnarvon to Swan Valley (wine) to Hyden (Wave Rock), to Fremantle to Margaret River (wine) and thus to the magnificent south west and forests of giant Tingle trees.

There are 3 species of Tingles (*Eucalyptus jacksonii*): Red, Yellow and Rate. The latter is named for John Rate who established that there was indeed a third species. By an odd and tragic quirk of fate, John Rate was killed by a falling tree limb in 1962.

We visited two Tingle tree locations. The first was the Giant Tingle track north of Walpole – a one-way dirt road but very accessible for conventional vehicles. There are numerous specimens of this magnificent tree along a well-defined track, but the star of the show is "The Giant", 75m high, girth

of 24m and estimated to be over 400 years old. The wood of these trees is quite soft and prone to rot around the base. In addition, fires which burn the base produce characteristic hollowing of the trunk with only a limited shell of live trunk actively supporting these awe-inspiring trees.



Red Tingle Tree Walpole

Base of Giant Tingle Tree



Close up of base of giant Tingle tree

A bit further East is the small town of Nornalup and the Tree Top Walk – a 600m walk, 40m above and among the tops of Tingle trees, and sometimes with the trees still towering above us. The burls and buttresses of the base of these trees produce some odd shapes, such as the “Grandma Tingle” tree, looking like the face of a wizened old lady – this grand dame of the forest is 34m high, has a girth of 12m and is also estimated to be over 400 years old. The range of the Tingles is limited as they require one metre of rain each year to survive.



Tree Top walk Nornalup so scale hard to view



Tree top Walk, Nornalup Grandma Tingle



Oak we thought

There were other interesting trees including one we thought was an escaped English oak tree – luckily good signage corrected us. It was a *Chorilaena quercifolia*, a Karri Oak. **Oak we thought.** Signage also identified a Karri She-oak *Allocasuarina decussata* and a Karri *Eucalyptus diversicolor*. Neither the Karri nor the Jarrah grow as tall as the Tingles but are valued for the density of their timber and the range and depth of their colours. This was an awesome part of our trip; one we will long remember. Text and photos by Judy Smith

STEP AGM Sunday 24 November 2019

The Green Room at the Village Centre was the location for the STEP AGM. Jenny Andrews was the Returning Officer and the following were elected.

President Judy Smith

Vice-President David Shorthouse

Secretary Elizabeth Minchin

Treasurer Ross Dalton,

Public Officer Andy Russell

Committee, Bill Handke, Andy Russell, Jennie Widdowson and Jane Cottee

STEP acknowledges the support of the following Corporate Members



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Invasion at STEP

During spring, STEP has been invaded by large numbers of nectar scarabs (*Phyllotocus rufipennis*). They can be currently seen on the snow gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) that are in flower and also on the red gums (*E. blakelyi*). The scarabs are small brown beetles with black legs. They can be seen with their heads tucked into the eucalypt flowers feasting on the nectar. The beetles are acting as pollinators as pollen on the flower anthers is transferred to their body as they feed and then transferred to another flower when they search for more nectar. During pollinator week, Andy and I estimated there were probably more than 3000 nectar scarabs on one tree.



Nectar scarab on snow gum



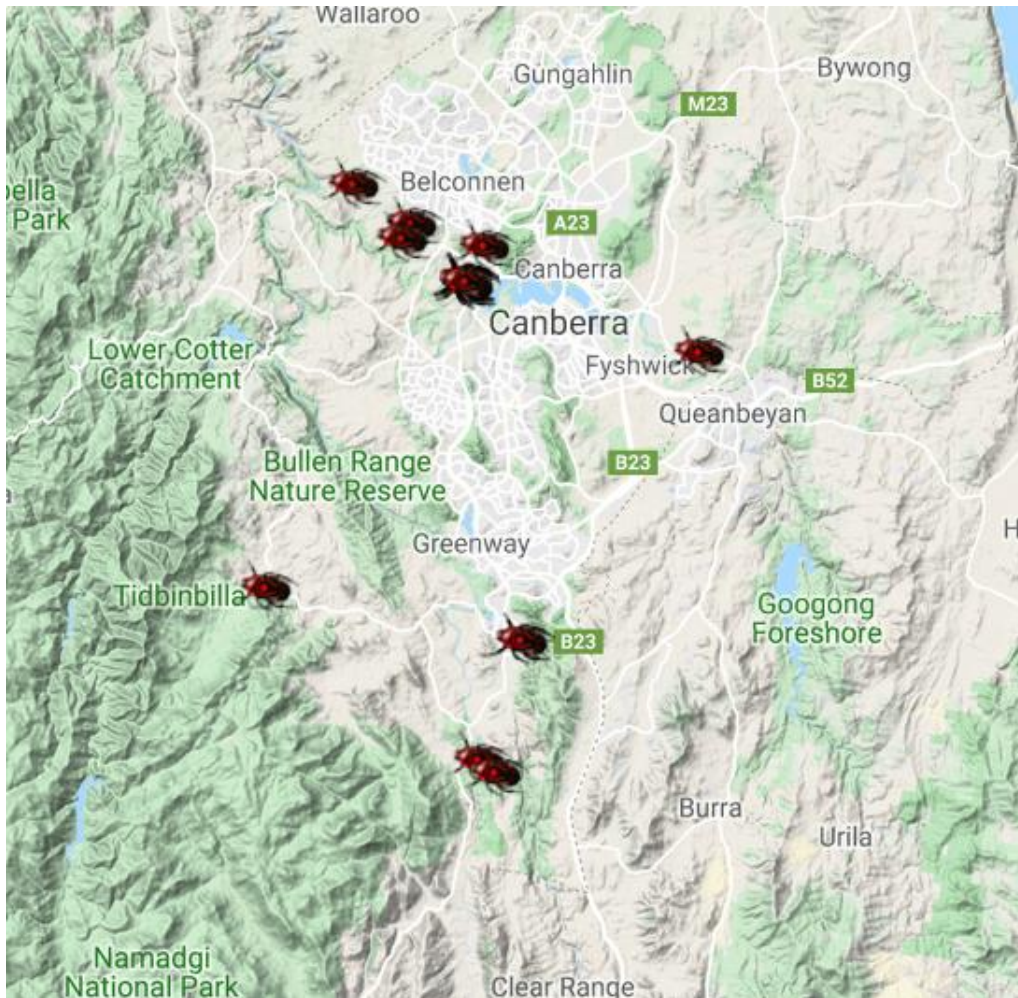
Nectar scarab on red gum

Last year, the Scribbly gums (*E. rossii*) flowered and the beetles invaded these trees. However, the broad-leaved peppermints (*E. dives*) have been flowering this year with very little interest from any insect. In contrast, when the red stringybarks (*E. macrorhyncha*) flowered last year, they were visited by a myriad of insects including 3 species of flower wasps, bristle flies, ants, honeybees and 2 species of beetles, but mainly not scarab beetles.

There is an extreme lack of information about what attracts the scarabs in such large numbers, but it could be the sweet smell of the nectar or the yeasty smell of the nectar as it ferments. There are also suggestions that the beetles are attracted to white objects as they have sometimes been found clinging to white coloured clothes on washing lines.

There are 6 species of nectar scarabs listed on Canberra Nature map. However, only two species have been mainly recorded. One species seems to be mainly found on eucalypt blossom while the other species feeds on other white flowers such as the *Ammobium* and *Bursaria*.

It would be expected that this would be a very common beetle from the numbers found at STEP, but the sighting distribution map from CNM shows that they have been mainly found in the areas close to the Molonglo valley and in the mountains (15 locations identified). According to I naturalist, nectar scarabs are found in southern Queensland, NSW, Victoria and Tasmania along the Great Divide and surrounding areas.



Distribution of nectar scarabs (Phyllotocus rufipennis) in the ACT as recorded on CNM.

Text and photos by Jennie Widdowson

STEP Newsletters are produced quarterly in March, June, September and December and are edited by Andy Russell.

Contact details for STEP are, by post, STEP President, PO Box 440, Jamison Centre ACT 2614. For newsletter or membership matters email contact is membership@step.asn.au

For further information on STEP please visit the STEP website at www.step.asn.au This includes membership information and the membership form.

Wild Pollinator Count

Twice a year (in November and March) this national event takes place over eight days from a Sunday to the following Sunday . Several STEP member were among the many people to make observation. I put in sixteen, half were done at Forest 20. These are some of my observations.



A Bee Fly *Comptosia insignis* and Metallic Green Carpenter Bee *Xylocopa aeratus* on *Xanthorrhoea johnsonii* Johnson's Grass Tree photographed at the ANBG on the same Grass Tree



Striped dung fly *Oxysarcodexia varia* and Common Hover Fly *Melangyna viridiceps* photographed at STEP on *Xerochrysum viscosum*, Sticky Everlasting.



Nectar scarab *Phyllotocus rufipennis* on *Hakea microcarpa* at STEP and Common Grass-blue *Zizina otis* taken near St John the Baptist Church, Reid. Photos and text by Andy Russell.